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PEKING 023

July 23, 1973

TO: HENRY KISSINGER

FROM: DAVID BRUCE

Returned to Peking tonight after a weeks absence. Have just read messages interchanged during this period between you, PRC and USLO on first, your proposed visit to China, and second, Cambodian problem. Obviously the two are inextricably linked.

In view of Chou En-lai and other Chinese officials earlier enthusiasm over prospects of your coming here, and high esteem in which you are held by them, I am somewhat mistified by evident change in the tone of their recent communications to you.

One possible explanation of their evasive attitude on dates might be accounted for if the widely rumored convocation of a Party Congress in mid August were to take place, if so your arrival shortly in advance of it might be considered an embarrassment. We probably will not, however, know whether this event will happen until the delegates are actually in session. I am inclined to discount this as a reason for their vacillation. Rather, I believe they may have been influenced by Congressional action on the elimination of U.S. bombing in Cambodia, August 15, and prefer to reassess the situation there afterwards. This could accord with Sihanouk's behavior in having already jaunted off to North Korea with the announced expectation of not returning to Peking before that date. Moreover, they may reckon that Lon Nol's authority in Cambodia is such a state of erosion that there is no desirability from their standpoint on intervening nor to bring about a settlement when by delay the terms of it would later be more advantageous to their overall interest.

I doubt that the PRC coolness represents an inability to deliver, though it may well be that they are in fact unable to control the agitated Prince and, in turn, are sceptical of his dominance over the native insurgent forces. If such is the case they could not want to become involved as intermediaries in an affair which might not prove profitable to them.

If this line of reasoning were correct, it still offers no valid explanation of their behaving in so cavalier a fashion about your visit. Perhaps they figure that if they adopt a

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neutral stance between ourselves, Sihanouk and revolutionary Cambodians, the result is likely to be the return of the wandering Prince to at least a titular even temporary position of power in Phnom Penh, at the cost of some transitory show of resentment on our part.

Having speculated thus far, if any of these hypothesis have merit, how should you respond to their note set forth in your Washington 019? Your Washington 020 contains an invitation for you through the LOPRC to come here on August 16. I think the dignified reply on your part would be to use their own wording: "August 16 is inconvenient to Dr. Kissinger, but he would be able to come to Peking from September 6 through September 9".

I am not sufficiently informed about the military situation in Cambodia to estimate the effect such a delay would have on eventual negotiations. Is there a chance that the Khmer Rouges and their associates through force of arms, or by a coup d'etat, will have overturned Lon Nol's government before real negotiations could commence?

As to the text of the note you propose to hand to Han Hsu on Tuesday (Washington 021) I have these comments:

Although the PRC message, repeated in Washington 019, is stern and uncompromising, there is nothing in the Chinese press official utterances that indicate an alteration in their generally friendly remarks about the United States. Taiwan is scarcely ever mentioned, but the strong support for Sihanouk and denunciation of the Lon Nol government has been undeviating.

To my mind the chief criticism we might direct against the PRC is that upon the Prince's return from his propaganda hegira the PRC (Chou En-lai) may not have confronted him with your offer of a ceasefire, cessation of American bombing etc., and has permitted him to go haring off on another journey. Such an assumption nevertheless, might be entirely incorrect; Chou En-lai may have presented our offer, even advocated its acceptance, and found it summarily rejected. If so we would probably never be informed.

To return to your tentative text. Paragraph 1 and 2 of text (not message) are satisfactory. Paragraph 3, in second sentence is statement "and no increase in U.S. activities" correct? Also in paragraph 3, sentence 3 I suggest the substitution of "difficult" for "impossible". In paragraph 3 sentence 5 I suggest the substitution of "utterly unreasonable"

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for "absurd". In paragraph 4, sentence 1 "so one sidedly dictated to it" appears to me somewhat unclear following the words "the U.S. side" in the same sentence. Instead of those words would not "so arbitrarily weighted against it" be preferable? In paragraph 4 last sentence how about changing "in these circumstances" to "in such circumstances", and instead of "will" substitute "would". As to the last paragraph it seems to me over moralistic and redundant in restating our consistent adherence to principle as if we were on the defense.

My personal feeling is that we shall be passing through a most difficult period in dealing with the Chinese government over Cambodia, and should play our hand coolly and courteously.

Warm Regards.

END OF MESSAGE.

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